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AN UNUSUAL MATERIAL FOR ABORIGINAL HOES.

By J. F. Steward.

Very naturally the kinds of aboriginal implements, as well as the specific forms thereof, wrought, as they often were, by untrained hands, conformed but imperfectly to service requirements. Although ever so skilled the hands in working the material available, that material seldom lent itself kindly to the means for shaping it, and few materials were susceptible to a variety of forms.

Although flint is hard, yet we may say that, in a sense, it was the most flexible of all the kinds of rock. It is hard and could easily be chipped, as shown by the many forms of implements and weapons left by the races gone. Although we know that traffic, particularly in copper, obsidian and the best varieties of flint, was carried on, yet each home locality was mainly depended upon for material from which to make the tools of agriculture and weapons for defense.

The dwellers of our "Great American Bottom," largely with fire as a quarrying tool (as was the wont of the wild tribes), dug from the bluffs along the Mississippi the sheets of thinly bedded flint, or chipped from the nodules of the sub-carboniferous formations the materials for the hoes we find in their deserted gardens and fields, many showing polish by long use.

Along the sea coasts the natives shaped, by breaking out and grinding, tools for their fields from the great sea shells as well as weapons for attack and defense. In the abandoned gardens of Florida are also uncovered, with

those worked from shells, many chipped from a siliceous limestone of the later geological deposits.

On the prairies, bordering which were groves of hard wood timber, where flints were only found in pebble form, a flattened stick, hardened by fire, was no doubt, used to prepare the soil and plant the corn. They are not now found; perishable, they passed away with the hands of maiden and matron that plied them.

But it is of unusual material availed of I set myself to record. In the glacial drift of northern Illinois many boulders exist, trappean, granite in various forms and mica shist, the latter not of the kind that crumbles, but of hardness shown to have been capable of withstanding the grinding action of the great glacial mill that brought and left them here. Years after the French had come and gone, and after the coming of the actual settlers, there yet remained a few natives, having their cabins, their fields and, as well (to satisfy their sporting spirits) their race course, at the upper part of the site of the Miami town of Maramech, on Fox river. While in the old fields I have found but one hoe of other material (a large flake of polished siliceous limestone) I have five of hard mica shist, the large one being 11 5-8 inches long. The largest here shown, three in number, still having the unsharpened working edges, were lying side by side, a little below the surface of the ground, flatly next to a boulder when the latter was being removed from the field. The smaller two were found in the abandoned gardens. There, in a beautiful grove of oaks, upon the bluff, rising from the river, and beside the old Sac and Fox trail, after having crossed the river ford at the island, were still found, by the whites, the cabins of a few of the natives. Where the three hoes had been hidden by their maker are fragments of the same material, and as that is seldom found worked into implements it is believed that here dwelt a workman, skilled in shaping the refractory rock, who made hoes for local use and barter. The passing

away of the manufacture and use of the crude implements was, seemingly, contemporaneous with the coming of the French, who brought superior tools for tilling the gardens of Maramech where, erstwhile, with tools so crude corn, beans, squashes and watermelons were made to grow—melons no doubt as sweet as those my boyhood there knew, tended by blades of shining steel.



